

## **British science writer wins top chemistry writing award**

With virtually every word that he writes, British science writer Philip Ball is changing how millions think about chemistry.

From his descriptions of water — “the two hydrogen atoms of the H<sub>2</sub>O molecule dangle from the central oxygen atom rather like Mickey Mouse’s ears from his head” — to his explanation of self-assembling nanoparticles — “It’s like making a watch by putting all the cogs and springs and so forth into a jar, rattling them around, and pulling out the fully assembled device” — Ball’s crisp, vivid prose helps make this sometimes baffling science comprehensible.

“Philip Ball has made enormous contributions to enabling the public to see chemistry as a science as captivating, exciting and profound as cosmology, genetics and evolution,” according to Matthew V. Tirrell, dean of the College of Engineering at the University of California, Santa Barbara. “His incisive analyses and presentations of many aspects of the chemical sciences have deep credibility with leading scientists and exceptional clarity and impact in transmitting these ideas to the public.”

Ball, a consultant editor for *Nature*, is the 2006 recipient of the American Chemical Society’s James T. Grady-James H. Stack Award for Interpreting Chemistry for the Public. Established in 1955, this annual award is the highest honor the Society gives for public communication about chemistry. Named after two former managers of the ACS News Service, the award aims to recognize, encourage and stimulate outstanding reporting that promotes the public’s understanding of chemistry, chemical engineering and related fields.

Ball will be honored at a luncheon at the National Press Club this fall; he will receive the \$3,000 Grady-Stack award, a gold medal and bronze replica at the Society’s spring national meeting next March in Atlanta.

Ball, according to Nobel laureate Roald Hoffmann, could easily “fill the big shoes” of 1965 Grady-Stack recipient Isaac Asimov, whom Hoffmann says was “a proper exponent of the beauties and wonder of chemistry.” In addition to Asimov, past Grady-Stack winners include Alton Blakeslee – Associated Press; Walter Sullivan – New York Times; Don Herbert – host of the Mr. Wizard television series; Arthur Fisher – Popular Science; and Joe Palca – National Public Radio. Since its inception, the award has been presented to many of the top names in science reporting from the nation’s leading newspapers, magazines, wire services and broadcast outlets.

Prior to beginning his freelance career, Ball worked as an editor for physical sciences at *Nature* for more than a decade, where his responsibilities extended from biochemistry to quantum physics and materials science. His writings on science for the popular press have covered topical issues ranging from cosmology to the future of molecular biology.

He is the author of several popular books on science, including works on the nature of water, pattern formation in the natural world, color in art, and the science of social and

political philosophy. His book, *Critical Mass: How One Thing Leads to Another*, received the 2005 Aventis Prize for popular science writing. In addition, Ball has written widely on the interactions between art and science, and has delivered lectures to scientific and general audiences at venues ranging from the Victoria and Albert Museum (London) to the NASA Ames Research Center and the London School of Economics.

He writes regularly for *News@Nature*, in particular for the editorial column *muse@nature*. He has contributed to publications ranging from *New Scientist* and *Nature* to the *New York Times*, the *Guardian*, the *Financial Times* and *New Statesman*. He has broadcast on many occasions on radio and TV, and in June 2004 he presented a three-part serial on nanotechnology, 'Small Worlds', on BBC Radio 4. He is also Science Writer in Residence at the Department of Chemistry, University College London.

Ball has a BA in chemistry from the University of Oxford and a PhD in physics from the University of Bristol.

The American Chemical Society is a nonprofit organization, chartered by the U.S. Congress, with a multidisciplinary membership of more than 158,000 chemists and chemical engineers. It publishes numerous scientific journals and databases, convenes major research conferences and provides educational, science policy and career programs in chemistry. Its main offices are in Washington, D.C., and Columbus, Ohio.

— Doug Dollemore

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